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Repercussions Embarrass Reds

Warsaw Trial of American Writer Puts Intellectual Freedom in Dock

By Robert H. Estabrook
The Washington Post Foreign Service
WARSAW, Nov. 15 — [Inte]

Intellectual freedom in this Communist-run country has been symbolically on trial with Polish-American writer Melchior Wankowicz, and like Wankowicz it is for the moment under sentence.

By all indications, Polish Communist leader Wladyslaw Gomulka ordered the arrest of Wankowicz as a warning to intellectuals who had protested against the increasing repression of the regime.

But the effect of Wankowicz's trial and conviction on

charges of "slandering Poland abroad" could be merely to whet dissatisfactions. Many Communists concede frankly that the whole affair was a bad mistake, and one official privately terms it "stupid" in terms of its repercussions.

So embarrassed is the government that it has approached Wankowicz secretly with an offer to let him leave the country. He has refused.

Wankowicz, 72, was sentenced last Monday to three years' imprisonment in a court proceeding that had cloak-and-dagger overtones. Among the accusations was

that material he had sent abroad was broadcast back to Poland by Radio Free Europe.

Half his sentence was remitted because of an amnesty last July after the alleged offense was committed. Wankowicz is now free pending appeal.

The case goes back to the courageous letter sent to Premier Josef Cyrankiewicz last March 14 by 34 intellectuals who complained about sharpened censorship and limitations on paper supplies to publications out of official favor.

The complaint was amply borne out by many individual frustrations.

Among the signers was Wankowicz, a naturalized American citizen who is simultaneously a leading Polish author. A popular Polish writer before World War II, Wankowicz was sentenced to death in absentia by the Nazis, obtained American citizenship in 1956 and returned here in 1958 to plunge into Polish affairs.

Government Displeased

Publication of the letter abroad made the government extremely unhappy, and various pressures were brought upon the less secure among the signers.

Although some stood their ground, 22 of the 34 subsequently said they had not intended their protest to be used as anti-Polish propaganda.

But Wankowicz did not recant. Instead he prepared a strong speech for a congress of Polish writers in Lublin on June 28, making a number of copies.

He distributed several of these to friends here. Another he sent through an intermediary to his daughter in Washington, Mrs. Jan Erdman, whose husband works for the United States Information Agency.

The speech itself was never delivered, but the substance was broadcast by Radio Free Europe, with no indication of how RFE obtained a copy. Officials here insist that Wankowicz sent a copy to his daughter with the intent that it would be passed on.

Woman Speaks

Although Wankowicz himself did not speak at the Lublin writers' congress, the grande dame of Polish letters, Maria Dombrowska, made a speech setting forth the views of the 34 and incorporating some of Wankowicz's points.

Then came another meeting of writers on Oct. 5, at which a top-ranking Polish Communist, Zenon Kliszko, denounced them for lending themselves to propaganda.

Almost as the writers were meeting, Wankowicz was arrested and charged with slander. Every sign pointed to the conclusion that the regime had previously determined to make him an example.

It is known that Gomulka personally ordered the arrest, explaining in effect that Wankowicz had broken Polish law and that there could not be one law for ordinary citizens and another for writers.

Wankowicz may have been technically guilty under Polish law. Because of the role he

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